MOON OF THE DESERT

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FLORENCE
ANNETTE
WING

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To the memory of my father and mother,

LEANDER JOSEPH WING *and* ANNETTE LOVERING WING

whose love of poetry and music gave substance
to our dreams.

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MOON OF THE DESERT

MOTHER SPIRIT

O fold your lonely wings and rest,
Dear Mother Spirit, bending low
To hear the tones of those loved best
You comforted and cherished so.

For us the weary hours toll on
Like mourning bells that sound and sigh
For mother ministry now gone—
Love's wingèd sandals hasten by.

MY FATHER

Your love wove shining threads of gold
Through every throbbing night and day,
The pain that life could not withhold
You shared with us and charmed away.

O voice belovèd, fount of song,
Uplifted for enduring right,
You sought o'er thorny paths and long
The heavenly citadel of light.

Love awhile and away,
Ho! A knight of the world,
You are bound for the fray
With your banner unfurled.

Love alway and remain,
Little heart, true and pure,
O the torturing pain
That your love must endure.

Do you hear, mother-bird,
Warmly nestling your young,
Forest notes, tempest-stirred,
Lilting songs you have sung?

Through the world's endless streets
Why in loneliness roam?
Where a mother-heart beats
There is home, there is home.

ENCANTADORA

Encantadora sleeps within its ring
Of lofty mountains, friendly sentinels.
Far, far above the Campus' velvet sod
The eucalyptus trees incline their heads
Like dervishes who bend to Allah's call.
The dawn comes shining thro' the dewy leaves
Upon the oleander's rosy bloom.
Within the mulberry and royal palm
The birds are straining little throats in song.
The pepper, graceful in her floating sheen,
A queen of fairy motion, flings around
Soft fantasies of evanescent foam.
Erect and lonely stands the rugged pine
With memories of shining nights of snow.
My dreams go journeying in quest of home,
A father's pride, a mother's loving prayer
Can lend to icy wilderness a glow.
'Midst all the beauty of the Southern flowers
The heart can find its desert solitude—
A kiosk in a garden is not home.

PRINCESS OF OLD EGYPT

Flower-dust of Egypt lying
In a valley rich with song,
Temple of a love undying
Where the old Nile streamed along.

Flame-red rubies glowed and glistened,
Now forgotten, lonely, dim.
Thirty centuries they listened
For the resurrection hymn.

Did acacia-blooms unfolding
Golden incense on the air,
Vigil near your prison holding,
Leave the scent of blossoms there?

X.

THE GOLDEN CHARIOT

Where Pharaoh drove his chariot over sand
The very palms inclined their heads to show
Their mute obeisance to his least command.
How swiftly did the hours in Egypt go!

The sun, blood-red, met ever in its quest
A pyramid whose harshly-fashioned stones
Imparted to its unforgetting breast
The stain of hopeless tears and anguished groans.

Egytian stars glowed with a solemn fire,
High candles burning at an altar-rail;
The old moon, vagrant, all the world's desire,
Was faring forth upon its shining trail.

Through dreaming gardens in the moon-drenched night
To San Giovanni on the river-rim
We watch feluccas wing their restless flight
And drink the cup of Egypt at the brim.

Where Pharaoh drove his chariot over sand
Acacias make a garden of the sky,
Forgotten are the dark dreams of the land,—
How swiftly do the golden moments fly!

DEAD SEA

You are sapphire of solitude framed in an ashen sand,
Lonely jewel Olympian deep as the bluest sky,
Siren mirror of beauty that gleams in a barren land,
Panorama eternal to capture the eye.

How your dragon-breath hushes melodious song
Of the distant bird travelers finding their way
To the land of crusader and pilgrimage long,
To the home of the Cross where the Comforter lay.

You are pungent as aloes, to sweet crystals renegade,
Certain death to strange fish, ocean-born though they be.
Whether moon-misted, azure, a tumble of liquid jade,
You are alien, unloved and yet lovely, Dead Sea.

GREETINGS

"Salutem dat," wrote Cicero,
"Saïda," Arabs say.
"Schoen guten Morgen," from Berlin,
"Bon jour," Parisian way.

"Buenos dias," in Madrid,
"Aloha," in Hawaii,
"Buon' giorno," in Milan;
"God grant you love," say I.

APPIAN WAY

Pearl-tinted were the lovely mists
That dimmed the Appian Way,
Before the sun's bright-lancèd lists
Dream-drugged they stole away.

Beyond the clustered ilex trees
By sea wind tossed to foam,
There beat through war and stern decrees
The mighty heart of Rome.

You were sculptured for sensitive poets' delight,
Trojan Helen, the far-fabled woman of wonder.
Like an exquisite flower you unfolded in sight
Of the banqueting gods whose Olympian thunder
Echoed forth in a loud, splendid pæan of praise
As it smote on the sullen, bronze portals of heaven.
Yours was beauty immortal, O Song of the Days,
Not the gift of one goddess, in truth, but of seven.

Gay blossoms flamed upon the sacred mount
Of old Hymettus. Woods with pæans rang.
There bees ecstatic drained each flower-fount
And in that golden land immortals sang.

O wine-like was the wind that left the sea
To fan the victors' laurels as they bent
Their haughty heads to Victory,
Their goddess from Olympus sent.

WARNING

Dark shadows of the Pharaohs haunt the Nile,
Avenging Isis faithful watch hath kept.
If thou dost with thy greed my tomb defile,
Thou'lt die accursed—unwept.

STORM

Shy forest leaves were whispering in the quickly darkening shade
While forkèd lightning quivered, flashed its trenchant, fiery sword.
Rain beat upon the shivering boughs in a charging cavalcade
And lashed and slashed the creaking trees like Attila's raging horde.

Pine odors from the bruisèd trees enriched the rain-sweet air
Where needle-censers dipped and swayed to forest rhythm slow.
Within the leafy temple song was swelling like a prayer
From those who worship under stars wherever tall trees grow.

"Naharak saïd umbarak, Salaam!"
(O prosperous be your day)
On distant, burning desert sands
The turbaned Arabs say.

Hail, silken-tasseled, gay tarboosh!
Your valiant color red
Means little children's wingèd feet,
Not mounds of slaughtered dead

That stain a demon-tortured land.
O Noble Shrine, you give
Al Hayat, Key of Life, to those
Who need your help to live.

Limbs twisted, torn by fever-pain,
With surgeons' loving skill
Grow straight and beautiful again
Life's duties to fulfill.

Your crescent moon and shining star
Shed splendor on their way,
Big brothers of the weak you are,
O prosperous be your day!

THE PILGRIM

As kneels a pilgrim at a holy shrine
I kneel in all unworthiness to you.
Through jungle swamp and serpent-clinging vine,
From falsely smiling friends I seek the true.

Loud beat of tom-tom, angry camel cry,
Gay Arab chatter in the Mouski throng,
There streams the human tide forever by,
On gain or pleasure bent, insistent, strong.

How often in the velvet desert night
When old Sakkara lay in drifting sand,
Beneath an arabesque of stars alight
My caravan of dreams turned toward your land.

Here every high cathedral mountain dreams,
Its snowy crown rose tinted with sun-glow,
Your eyes are pure as crystal Alpine streams
I kneel and find true sanctuary so.

SAHUARO [1]

So regally holding your towering head,
You stand, giant sahuaro, supreme o'er the band
Of ruggedly living or gaunt, spectral dead,
Their powerful sentinel guarding the land.

You are swaying and crooning a wilderness song,
Lovely star-flowers are crowning your brow,
The wind bears the fragrance of blossoms along
From old-fashioned rose bush and rain-shaken bough.

Jewel-like cholla and rugged mesquite,
Grim ocotilla with lances on high,
These are the subjects that lie at your feet,
Lord of the infinite desert and sky!

[1] There are various spellings of this word "Sahuaro." In Arizona it is usually pronounced "Swaro" or "Swara."

'Tis a day when the gay desert gleams,
When the fair, golden shield of the sun
Swiftly flashes its bayonet beams
For its victories splendidly won.

There's a day when the old desert dreams,
Then the Nile in its palm-bordered bed
So persistently seeks near the streams
All the grim battlefields of the dead.

Every gray day a memory brings
Of those wonder-filled, long-vanished hours
As the Nile wind its requiem sings
Over petals of soft lotus flowers.

'Tis a day when the wild desert raves,
How the khamsin is scorching the land;
O our Allah, forbid that the graves
Of Thy servants be found in the sand!

The white moon of the East rides above
And the wan, weary desert now sleeps.
O rest, lonely Arab in love
'Neath the watch which the great Allah keeps.

RHYTHM OF DEATH

Do you hear the slow rhythm of death
As it beats in Mohammedan land?
High over the garden the breath
Of the lotus buds gently is fanned.

In the lane where acacias bloom
Arab mourners are chanting a dirge.
Old Egypt weaves black in her loom
By the Nile river's somnolent surge.

Little stars pierce the pall of the night,
Lonely caravans struggle and sway
Toward Mecca, their city of light.
On your rugs, Fellaheen, kneel and pray!

There had fallen the sound of lament on the air,
The complaint of a bird that was ailing,
When I found at an unopened door, hidden there,
That a desolate Love was bewailing.

"O, why mournest thou, lonely lover," I cried,
"Let me touch thee and comfort thy sorrow,
For thou art so little, by life so untried,
That I fain a wee burden would borrow."

Then the cry died away,—in a silence complete
But Love laughed as he crept through the portal!
Where the warrior god turns his mischievous feet,
What avail the defenses of mortal?

AN EGYPTIAN SHRINE

In my book of remembrance I fold you today,
Rarest treasure between the pale leaves,
For the Past has a lotus bud hidden away
But the Present is empty and grieves.

Red roses and gay bougainvillea vine,
Eucalyptus and deep passion flower
In an old-fashioned garden in Egypt, a shrine
Near a slender Mohammedan tower,

Minaret that was piercing the radiant hood
Of the tender, blue Orient sky;
Muezzin, the trumpet of Allah, the Good,
Called to worship the throngs passing by.

There was wafted an Arab song plaintive with love
On the desert-sweet, sun-filtered air,
While the rose petals, weary of drifting above,
Fell in utter content in your hair.

Did the shadow of sable wings darken our day,
Of Isis, Avenger, who cast
A blot on our sunshine in wrathful dismay
At a love that was worthy to last?

We are gliding down the river
in an Indian canoe,
How the soft trees lend their shadows
Where the river bank in view
Is revealing Norman vista,
sun-flecked hollow, winding away
And we sing upon the water
as Winona nears the bay.
Cloud-flotillas voyage lightly
over heaven's celestial sea,
Like the heartbeat of the river
pressing outward to the bar
Or the rhythm of the paddle
in September's golden key
Comes the throbbing of the singing
and the troubadour guitar.

THE SPIRIT OF LAUGHTER

O I am the Spirit of Laughter, make haste
To kneel at my shrine when you can,
For I lighten the terrible burdens that waste
The heart and the spirit of man.

As I catch the brave flag from the quivering hands,
The gold of my sunshine I pour
On the desolate souls in the pain-shadowed lands.
O in gratitude kneel and adore!

Take a torch from my altar to blazon the way,
Cavil not, for your mission is high,
There's a fount in sweet laughter that purifies clay
And a healing no ruby can buy.

Eucalyptus trees, nodding in drowsy content,
With their soft fringèd beauty outlined on the sky,
Are dreaming of sunny days wondrously spent
When the Wind, the marauder, comes hurrying by.

On and on comes the demon Wind, seeking his prey,
Sweeping forth from his mountain lair, rugged and gaunt,
From the pack of the wind wolves that, snarling at bay,
Drive their hunger-scourged brothers away from their haunt.

As the arrogant Pharaohs lashed under command
The masses of trembling, obedient folk,
And exacted their toil with a merciless hand,
So the Wind bends the mutinous trees 'neath his yoke.

O the torturing rack of the endless review,
With the crashing unrest of impenitent boughs.
Humbly bend, Eucalyptus, your homage renew,
'Tis the master Wind bids you return to your vows.

There sounds a note of carnival to-day
Within the sober, high New England hills.
What tender revelry! The little rills
Are bubbling with their eagerness for play.
In woods pine-fragrant as in budding May
Gay maples flaunt their flags. With liquid trills
The unseen chorus sings a hymn that fills
Each golden vista of the stony way.

O wind-swept mountain altars! Not on sand
Our leader built his constant faith. He saw
God shining on the heights and humbly spanned
Deep valleys with his prayer. Without a flaw
Of soul he showed us in his cherished land
That firm Gibraltar of our father's law.

You need no diadem to crown you queen
For Nature made you royal. In your hair
She left the sunlight, laughter, glancing sheen,
To tremble in the silken curtain there.

Your eyes, deep wells of understanding light,
Show tender pity for each wounded thing.
You are a friend in lowliness or might
With brave and patient lips that smile and sing.

MY HUMMING-BIRD

What an ardent little neighbor
Is my morning humming-bird
Ere the world begins its labor
Or the indolent have stirred!

He's a golden green collector
From each rosy, sleepy flower
As he quaffs his daily nectar
In my dewy garden bower.

TZIGANE

My violin of dusky brown
Sings wondrous gypsy songs to me
While we go on adventuring down
The shady wood-road to the sea.

Green trees adorn our banquet-hall,
Pine needles glaze the dancing floor,
Soft, singing winds and robins' call
Are hushed in rapture at our door.

Tzigane is singing lullabies,
Enchanting czardas' woven fire,
Gay jotas from Castilian skies
And liquid notes of Attic lyre.

THE NURSE

She moves along the dimly-lighted hall
With blessed healing in her tender hand,
Her heart a flame of sympathy for all
The pain she sees within this shining land.

She carries sunshine to the lonely rooms.
The beds are valiant battle-fields where Death
So seldom is the conqueror. There blooms
That precious flower of sacrifice, Heaven's breath.

Life's tempests drive us swiftly on the rocks
Of illness and the barren shore of pain.
This young Samaritan heals wounds, unlocks
The door of health and we are free again.

Sweet spirit of a mother, shining through
The ministry of tireless hands and eyes,
Lends wings to weary feet so they renew
Their silent swiftness where each duty lies.

THE HEALER

I borrowed sweetness from the honey-bee,
Some deep-hued petals from a Jacqueminot.
The bitter grayness that enveloped me
Became a spirit-warming, crimson glow.

The apple trees shed precious, fragrant blooms,
Its opal-tinted wealth upon my gown,
Soft arabesques from dainty, fairy looms
The monarch of the orchard lavished down.

God sends the sun and rain, and that true seal
And crown of all His flower gifts—the rose,
He lends us Nature's loveliness to heal
Life's ugly wounds and preying human woes.

RED EMBERS

Red embers fade from ruddy coals
To dull and lifeless ash of gray.
Chill Twilight from the Day unrolls
Her gold-embroidered garment gay.

Night flings her sombre, heavy pall
Upon the Earth with labor wan.
Whose sorcery can end the thrall?
The tender-eyed and lovely Dawn.

SUNRISE

Behind the eucalyptus trees
The sun rides like a cavalier,
His pennants float upon the breeze
And chariots of flame appear.

Caparisoned in gold and blue,
His restless charger spurns the way
Of velvet night, to seek anew
The splendid avenues of day.

Beyond the eucalyptus screen
Old Egypt's mysteries unfold,
A tender filigree of green
Upon a field of living gold.

Triumphant o'er the lonely night
With dainty petal flags unfurled,
The flowers are hailing with delight
The monarch of the morning world.

PALE NEMESIS

You are not to be forgotten, though
My thoughts of you remain
Like old knives probing tender wounds
Till raw and fierce again.

Pale Nemesis of Memory,
You sharpen and refine
The blur of bitter happening
To Pain's clear, perfect line.

You enchanted my soul with your singing,
Your hair was the pale floss of corn
And the bells of your voice kept on ringing
In a tumult of sound through the morn.

You have molded my life with your fingers,—
Can you ever look coldly upon
The heart where your memory lingers
When the joy of your presence is gone?

I'll use the keen north wind to send
A tender billet-doux.
The rainbow's arch I'll curve and bend,
Until it kneels to you.

The moon's a great old traveller;
I'll just annex my car
And ride through all this sleepy night
To stop right where you are.

VERA

Vera, virginal and fine,
Vestal of the violin,
From her instrument divine
Lures the song that sleeps therein.

Notes that rouse the lonely plain
Ermine-clad with drifted snow,
Mad mazurka, shrill war pain,
Flame beneath her flying bow.

SONNET TO A BEAUTY

To make you sparkle like the morning sun
Men delve in gloomy mines with bleeding hands.
To send you milky pearls and jeweled bands
So many weary, painful steps are run.
That you may wear rich fabrics, cobweb-spun,
Long caravans creep over burning sands
And garner treasure from the hidden lands
To heighten glory all too dearly won.
An empty vase of alabaster rare!
No love for others lights that faultless shrine.
More noble is the one with lines of care
Who, in her self-forgetfulness divine,
For others seeks each bitter cross to bear,
Pours forth her heart like rich and fragrant wine.

THE FLIRT

A heart is a curio—then let it break!
There are so many others and you have no time
To mourn o'er the heart-wreck and havoc you make,
To appeal to the high gods in penitent rhyme.

Earth's rich with red roses, heaven ringing with song,
Though some may pluck cypress, not roses, and weep,
What matter to you if the June nights be long
To those who toss wretchedly when they should sleep?

Rippling waste of rushing water swinging
White sails till they're shaken fair and free.
Earth's cathedral has no other singing
Like the mother-crooning of the sea.

White tern flashing to her ocean reaping,
Soft winds bearing us so far away
To the dream-world of the ocean sleeping
Where contented sea-folk idly play.

Turquoise is the arch of heaven dreaming
O'er the azure of the vagrant sea.
Javelins of golden sunbeams streaming
Cast a Rajah's ransom over me.

Wind-tossed surf and angry billow railing
And below—untroubled halls of sleep
Where no whisper of a wave song wailing
Stirs the quiet of the lonely deep.

ULYSSES, THE WANDERER

Ulysses of the mighty bow was famed
For deeds performed in war-scourged Ilium
In dire distress. The never-silent sea
Revealed to him its secrets, bore him on
To distant cities, siren shores. At length
He trod the welcome earth of Ithaca.
And found Penelope, his constant wife,
Who wove a brilliant web of lovely hues
And dreamed of brave Ulysses, wandering far.

Now rosy-fingered Dawn had sought her couch
And left the Ocean, dark and threatening.
Waves beat on angry waves and far below
Within the columned halls of perfect sleep,
Old Neptune felt the thrill of tumult wild
And hastened forth to quell its turbulence.
Upon the restless bosom of the deep
The fleet of staunch Æneas he espied,
Like wounded birds the dark ships fluttered on,
The prey of vagrant winds and swelling sea.

Beside the hollow ships Achilles sat
And mourned his dear Briseis, fair of face,
For haughty Agamemnon, Atreus' son,
Had vexed him sore. Of all the noble hosts
Of long-haired Greeks who crossed the wine-like sea,
He hated most the king who laid command
On him, the godlike leader of the throng.

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